

Method for scoring dirtiness of scratching materials in enriched cages

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The EU Council Directive in which minimum standards for laying hens are laid out, states that when enriched cages are used litter must be provided to the birds. This is often done by laying a type of scratching mat in the cage on which litter is provided regularly. The downside to this is that these facilities are often very dirty, especially if placed too close to a perch or feed trough. This results in an extra numbers of dirty eggs if the birds use these mats as places to lay their eggs, but it can also raise the incidence of diseases since the animals come into contact with their excreta. In order to compare the different scratching materials regarding dirtiness, a scoring method was developed. The scores range from zero to four, indicating no dirt or totally covered in dirt; this provides an objective way of comparing different materials. In order to meet the terms in the EU Directive, birds in enriched cages must be provided with a litter area. However, to prevent lower egg quality or possible disease risks the choice of scratching material is important. The dirtiness of these materials can be compared and evaluated using a simple scoring system. Keywords: laying hens; enriched cage; litter mat.

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